

I remember the night before my first “trial” sermon, so to speak. I was to preach at a neighboring congregation to the one that would turn out to be my first call out of seminary. However, as I sat in that hotel room...it just didn't feel right. It wasn't because of the content, style or length of the one I already wrote (not that it was the greatest by any stretch of the preaching imagination, either). Instead, I struggled knowing something just...awful happened the day before.

Because, that Friday, July 22, 2011, a man boarded a ferry to a small island in Norway, before he went into a crowd of young people and started shooting, leaving scores of lives dead. So...something *had* to be said. Maybe a “trial” sermon for a potential first call wasn't the time or the place to do it. Who knows what was the theological or social or cultural make-up of that call committee, who would be showing up at that neighboring congregation that morning? I could have gone too far in whatever I said. Nevertheless, something *had* to be said. After all, God loved those children too.

I struggled with the same...I-don't-even-know-the-word-anymore a couple weeks ago. Bombings went off in Sri Lanka, leaving over 250 dead. Something *had* to be said. Well, something *should* have been said, but on

Easter Sunday? Should this not be the most joyous, max-out the organ speakers, smiles galore, all part of the most heartfelt Great News-assurance that the church dare not mess up by declaring any not-Great News during that ultimate celebration of the Resurrection Day?

And so, my only struggle turned out to be how best to insert the Sri Lankans into the prayers of intercession that Easter morning. It's almost as if the victims and their families just became another cliché "thoughts and prayers" culturized tagline-response. We go through the usual reaction: "That's just so awful...that's just so sad...what kind of world do we live in?" Well...here are our "thoughts and prayers...best of luck!"

I know most of us don't toss around the *prayer* word so haphazardly. I know many sisters and brothers in Christ throughout the world, sisters and brothers in Christ to the Sri Lankans too, are significantly pained by the horrendous atrocity on what was their Resurrection Day celebration too. I know many sisters and brothers in Christ will pray with their whole heart-mind-and-soul sacred combination and will even donate time, money and more, to positively impact the present and future of the families and individual churches affected by the hideous blasts.

Now, part of the struggle for me was knowing the worldwide reaction of sadness, despair, gut-wrenching sorrow over what happened to the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. I will be the first to admit, I have pictures of that architectural magnificence at home. It was the first cathedral I experienced outside the United States. It holds plenty of nostalgic wonderfulness for me, including for my favorite teacher growing up; that being, my middle school and high school French teacher, who led us on a journey of a lifetime. But, come on...250+ not stones, not pews, not spires...250+ human beings left to waste in a place God loves just as much as America, all of Europe and the rest of the world. Sri Lanka is where God lives too.

It is in these moments of personal struggle that are incredibly miniscule in comparison to what happened and, still, is happening to our Sri Lankan sisters and brothers; it is in these moments that I am thankful for the first part of a verse in the Psalm this morning that many children of God cling to throughout a lifetime. I am thankful that God has a bit of wrath, because I need God to be angry over this. I need God to not just nonchalantly say, "It'll be okay, I have plenty of room for them in the heavens." I need God to get upset, to be furious over how life can be desecrated with such

incomprehensible hate and uncontrollable lust for power. I need God to, still, have a bit of wrath over such a struggle that persists long after a Messiah came along and unleashed a Gospel of peace and mercy and compassion.

And yet, just as importantly, I, also, need God to have that favor that lasts a lifetime. I need God to be different than us. I need God to have a different response than more hate, more violence, more retribution to, somehow, “make things right” in our human mode of justice. I need our human wailing and mourning to transform into joy and dancing. I need God to be the peace that surpasses all our understanding. The Sri Lankans need it too. In the end, God had them in mind just as much when he shattered open the tomb of death. God didn’t just do it for us or for those in European cathedrals. Jesus busted out of that tomb of hate and violence to go to Sri Lanka too: to make sure they never forget that not even the most heinous death can separate them, or any of us, from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Risen Lord. And for that Greatest News of all that, still, remains true through it all, we give thanks to God indeed! Amen!